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Exhausted Landscapes: Reframing the Rural in Recent Argentine and Brazilian Films

by JENS ANDERMANN

Abstract: This article analyzes the compositional modes and signifying functions of landscape in four recent Latin American films. Comparing their deployment of the landscape form with rural-based predecessors from Brazilian and Argentine cinematic modernity, the article traces an exhaustion of landscape as purveyor of allegorical meanings. Yet the more recent films also reveal—through their self-conscious deployment of the landscape form—the historical conditions of this crisis, thus paradoxically endowing landscape once again with epistemological valences beyond the time-image.

Historical Geography. Fredric Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping has long informed critical efforts in film studies to access through formal analysis the modes of cinematic self-reflexivity—that is, the way in which films think about their own place and intervention in both the national and the “global distribution of cultural power.”¹ Jameson's notion conflates the spatial dimension of urban geographer Kevin Lynch's mental image of the city—to which inhabitants have recourse to negotiate their way through the contingencies of urban space—with Althusser's idea of ideology as the imaginary representation of subjects' relationships to their real conditions of existence. Likewise, for Jameson, films and other cultural artifacts construct on the level of form—rather than of representational “content”—models of their relation to the social totality, including a conceptualization of their own mediality and its place and function within that totality.² More recently, Dudley Andrew has suggested that there might also be some critical mileage in taking literally Jameson's terminology, to “examine the film [itself] as map—cognitive map—while placing the film *on* the

1 Colin MacCabe, preface to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, by Fredric Jameson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xv.

2 See Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 25, 49.

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map.” Films, Andrew suggests, in the way they engage with the natural and man-made landscape, literally map out a territory and the ways in which it is subject to historical change, for both locals and foreign viewers: “Films make palpable collective habits and a collective sensibility. In their inclusions and exclusions, in their scope and style, films project cognitive maps by which citizens understand both their bordered world and the world at large.”³

In this article, I wish to apply Andrew’s productive misreading of Jameson to four recent films from Argentina and Brazil in which, I argue, the rural interior of these countries is remapped in a singular fashion: Mariano Donoso’s *Opus* (Argentina, 2005), Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes’s *I Travel Because I Have To, I Return Because I Love You* (*Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo*; Brazil, 2009), Lisandro Alonso’s *The Dead* (*Los muertos*; Argentina, 2004), and Andrea Tonacci’s *The Hills of Disorder* (*Serras da desordem*; Brazil, 2006). I argue that these films’ presentational qualities—their modes of making us “understand both their bordered world and the world at large”—are to an extent contested by an archival self-consciousness, that is, by the way in which they both call on and dismiss the repertoire of rurality proper to a previous, national cinematic modernity. Thus, they both identify rural landscape as an iconic, historically layered and contested site of representation and enact the exhaustion of this very tradition.

Cinematic modernity (and particularly its Latin American versions, such as *Cinema Novo*, or “new cinema,” and *tercer cine*, or “third cinema”) once used to mobilize the landscape’s political and mnemonic dimensions through a temporalization of the image that forced out the historicity of places beyond their diegetic function as settings of the action. This excessive or supplementary potential of landscape—in particular, of rural or marginal urban spaces—was invested with epistemological authority by notions such as the Deleuzian time-image, which suspends narrative and figuration to “brin[g] out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be ‘justified’ for better or worse.”⁴ In the films studied here—which, I would argue, indicate a wider trend in contemporary Latin American cinema also including, say, Paz Encina’s *Paraguayan Hammock* (*Hamaca paraguaya*; Argentina, Paraguay, and The Netherlands, 2006), Carlos Reygadas’s *Silent Light* (*Stellet Licht*; Mexico, France, and The Netherlands, 2007), and *Light after Darkness* (*Post tenebras lux*; Mexico, France, and The Netherlands, 2012), or Fernando Eimbcke’s *Lake Tahoe* (Mexico, Japan, and the United States, 2008)—the time-image as purveyor of historical meaning clashes with the lack of legible inscriptions in the places it captures, the viewer’s attention thus being diverted to the rhetorical, indeed conventional, nature of this kind of image. At the same time, the time-image is both being announced and being deferred by the presence of a “native character” who literally stands between the viewers and the landscape, thus denying us a view of the latter independent from the temporality of the character’s actions (which initially appear to be set in “the time of nature” itself, only to reveal their own profound entanglement

3 Dudley Andrew, “An Atlas of World Cinema,” in *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 24–25.

4 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 3, 20.

with the polis and the market). But through the various forms of registering, in these foreclosed or trivialized images of rurality, the exhaustion of the landscape form as inherited from (national) cinematic modernity, the films also paradoxically reinvest landscape with historical density. Landscape becomes the measure here for the crisis of meaning that separates the present from the national-popular moment from which *Cinema Novo* and “new Latin American cinema” took their cues—a separation that, historically speaking, corresponds to the periods of dictatorship and of neoliberal dismantling of national economies and societies. Some of the more nostalgic neo-ruralist returns to Latin America’s provincial interior—say, Alfonso Cuarón’s *And Your Mother Too* (*Tu mamá también*; Mexico, 2001), María Novaro’s *Leaving No Trace* (*Sin dejar huella*; Mexico and Spain, 2001), and Pablo Giorgelli’s *Las acacias* (Argentina and Spain, 2011)—have responded to this process by means of affective reinvestment of their rural locations. In the films analyzed here, in contrast, the critique of history is achieved through cognitive mapping, that is, by simultaneously mapping the image and its conditions of emergence.⁵

Before discussing the films by Donoso, Ainouz and Gomes, and Alonso and Tonacci, I briefly summarize the role of landscape and the rural interior in Argentine and Brazilian cinematic modernity. I then discuss the predominant compositional forms through which landscape is engaged in each of the four films under analysis before offering some conclusions that return to the argument set out above on landscape’s exhaustion and (paradoxical) reemergence as a mode of conveying historical experience.

The Rural in Latin American Cinematic Modernity. The landscape in film, Martin Lefebvre argues, should not be confounded with the diegetic setting, as scenic background to which can be entrusted various rhetorical functions of exposition, emphasis, or counterpoint in relation to the plot or to specific characters. Instead, he suggests, landscape represents the excess or remainder of this subordinate function of space. Landscape interrupts, as place, the narrative continuity. It introduces into the diegesis another *time* associated with the intrinsic duration of a world external to the diegesis. This double visual regime of space and place, setting and landscape, then, is an effect of the gaze itself, which alternates—in a way similar to the one prompted by the iconic body of the star—between a “narrative” and a “spectacular mode” of beholding screen space:

[Landscape] is subjected simultaneously to the temporality of the cinematographic medium and to that of the spectator’s gaze, which is given to shifting from the narrative to the spectacular mode and back again from one moment to the next. This doubled temporal existence results in the precariousness of a landscape that more or less vanishes when the narrative mode takes over and the cinematic space resumes its narrative function as setting.⁶

5 For a discussion of film as cartography, see also Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1–22.

6 Martin Lefebvre, “Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema,” in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre (London: Routledge, 2006), 29.

This suspension of narrative continuity through place, Lefebvre continues, always implies an active choice on behalf of viewers to let their gaze linger and explore the scene beyond the necessities of narrative and setting. However, such a “spectacular” engagement with the landscape can also be actively encouraged, as, for instance, through moments of diegetic inaction (*temps morts*) or directly through shots without any diegetic motivation spliced into the unfolding of the argument—that is, by drawing out the diegetic setting’s autonomy as landscape or by inserting into it another, autonomous, and “displaced” space, which cannot be reconducted into narrative progress. Either way, Lefebvre concludes, the double regime of cinematic space as setting and as landscape allows cinema to tease out a critical viewing capable of relating the constructivism of the editing to the intricacy and real durations of the material world, and of playing—as does the filmmaker—one against the other in a dialectic akin to that of history itself.

This anamorphic nature of screen space, as constantly suspended between setting and landscape, was actively deployed by the new Latin American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s to stage its dialectical critique of neocolonial oppression and the complicity of classic narrative cinema. This critique often took the form of revisiting—in a tension between allegorical overdetermination and documentary authentication of the image—the rural epics, which classic sound film from the 1930s and 1940s had constructed as a national founding myth and as a way of importing the cinematic modernity of Hollywood genres.⁷ In classic Latin American cinema of the “golden age” period, the rural interior and its epic clashes between passionate, courageous, and cruel *gauchos*, *cangaçeiros*, and *llaneros* (as cowboys and rural bandits are known in various parts of Latin America) had provided a screen for projecting the nation’s mythical origins at the same time that they inserted these as local content into the cosmopolitan languages of film genres and their urban audiences. Simultaneously crafting a narrative of origins that a heterogeneous, cosmopolitan urban audience could identify with, the rural interior in these films was also folklorized and prehistoricized as irredeemably “other” and thus as bound to succumb sooner or later to the forces of progress and a civilization whose agents, in films such as *Savage Pampas* (*Pampa bárbara*; Lucas Demare and Hugo Fregonese, Argentina, 1945) or *The Ninth Bullet* (*O cangaçeiro*; Lima Barreto, Brazil, 1953), already claimed moral victory.⁸

Filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s would actively tease out this antagonism between the camera and its rural subjects disavowed in the genre cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, to stage, on the level of form, an appropriation of the apparatus and of narrative techniques, the struggle between neocolonial oppression and national-popular liberation. Instead of an industrial cinema “committed to untruth and exploitation,” as Glauber Rocha put it in his 1965 famous essay-manifesto “Aesthetic of Hunger,” Brazil’s *cinema novo* chose the margins in order to “come into its own as a politics of

7 Of course, silent film had already attempted a similar fusion of local and cosmopolitan genre traditions, as, for instance, in the Argentine attempts to combine the *sainete* (a vernacular genre of theatrical grotesque) with slapstick, or in ruralist melodramas such as Humberto Cairo’s *Gaucha Nobility* (*Noblezza gaucha*; Argentina, 1915) and Humberto Mauro’s *Brutal Gang* (*Ganga bruta*; Brazil, 1933).

8 Célia Aparecida Ferreira Tolentino, *O rural no cinema brasileiro* (São Paulo: Editora Unesp, 2001), 65–71; Eduardo Romano, *Literatura/cine argentinos sobre la(s) frontera(s)* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1991), 108–113; César Maranghello, *Breve historia del cine argentino* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2005), 69–112.

hunger, and as suffering, consequently, from all the weaknesses of its existence.”⁹ For this politically and aesthetically radical cinema, Luiz Zanin Oricchio argues, the rural backlands and the margins of the city were no longer a primitive origin but the very focal point of contemporariness, “the privileged ‘scenarios’ for the observation of the country. From the articulation of this gaze, it was expected, a paradigm of the Brazilian real would emerge, a sociological laboratory in which to observe, *in vitro* and *in vivo*, the contradictions determining the way the country functioned.”¹⁰ Similarly, in Argentina, films such as Leonardo Favio’s *The Romance of Aniceto and Francisca* (*Romance del Aniceto y la Francisca*; Argentina, 1966) and *Juan Moreira* (Argentina, 1973) and Fernando E. Solanas’s *The Sons of Fierro* (*Los hijos de Fierro*; Argentina, 1972–1975) reappropriated the popular epic of social banditry as an allegory of the nation’s political plight, based on a third-worldist, anticolonial reading of the contradictions between metropolis and hinterland.

The double regime of landscape as diegetic space and as historical place was actively put to use in films such as Glauber Rocha’s *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*; Brazil, 1963) as a way of splitting the narrative instance between an immanent and a detached point of view, without either of them getting the upper hand. As Célia Ferreira Tolentino puts it: “[B]eyond the horizon of the troubadour-narrator, the subliminal, erudite narrative instance presented the *sertão* [the arid backlands] as an allegory of [Brazil], allowing us to study the formation of a revolutionary consciousness. But even as the *sertão* becomes a totalizing metaphor . . . the film’s greatness lies in the way it subordinates this universal historical perspective to the specificity of national history.”¹¹ The alternation on the sound track between blind troubadour Júlio’s *cordel* folk song and the great orchestral gestures of Villa-Lobos’s “Canção do Sertão” (Song of the Sertão) exemplifies this double framing, as does the relation between actors and camerawork, which alternates between a conventional action-image and long pans around extended, theatrical poses, thus drawing attention to the location as well as making it stagelike.¹²

More recent Argentine and Brazilian films, following the resurgence of film production after years of dictatorship and financial crisis, have returned to the characters and locations of the 1960s and 1970s, albeit now—as Lúcia Nagib puts it, referring to Brazil’s cinematic *retomada* (“renaissance”) of the 1990s—in a mode of “nostalgic reminiscenc[e] of past allegories, of a time when starting from zero was possible, cinema was really new and the characters, in their revolutionary impulse, dragged the masses with them.”¹³ In films such as Argentine Carlos Sorín’s *A King and His Movie* (*La película del rey*; Argentina, 1986) and Brazilian José Araújo’s *Landscapes of Memory* (*O sertão das memórias*; Brazil, 1996) these utopian allegories are already self-consciously

9 Glauber Rocha, “Eztesyka da fome,” in *Revolução do cinema novo* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 67.

10 Luiz Zanin Oricchio, *Cinema de novo: Um balanço crítico da retomada* (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2003), 121.

11 Tolentino, *O rural no cinema brasileiro*, 193.

12 The *cordel* is a traditional poetic and musical form in the Brazilian northeast, often transmitting in verse and in the form of popular legend, news of local events including fights among rural bandits, landowners, and state forces. On the musical “duel” on the sound track of *Black God, White Devil*, see Ismail Xavier, *Sertão mar: Glauber Rocha e a estética da fome* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 112–117.

13 Lúcia Nagib, *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 48.

citations, reencounters with the Patagonian south and Brazil's rural northeast that are already cinematic (more explicitly in the case of Sorin's film, which returns to an earlier project interrupted under political pressure in 1972). In others, such as Walter Salles's *Central Station* (*Central do Brasil*; Brazil and France, 1998) or Pablo Trapero's *Rolling Family* (*Familia rodante*; Argentina, Brazil, and France, 2004), the return to a romanticized, more innocent and pure interior that allows the self-estranged urban protagonists to reconnect with their deeper, national-popular selves is simultaneously a clever revisiting of the locations from the past of national cinema through the prism of the universal genre of the (anti-)road movie. Brazilian film theorist Ivana Bentes, in a polemical essay, accused these filmmakers of undertaking an "idealized return to the origins," a mere "cosmetics of hunger" that reverses not just the historical and political movement from hinterland to seaside at the end of Glauber's *Black God, White Devil* but also betrays the spirit of *cinema novo* by adding a merely nostalgic coda, a "melancholic and reconciliatory happy ending, that distances itself from [*Cinema Novo's*] utopian wager of transcendence and freedom."¹⁴

However, this movement of "return to the interior," rather than being confined to melancholic reconciliation, can also turn into a revelation of historical struggle and defeat, separating the present from the utopianism of the 1960s. Eduardo Coutinho's *Twenty Years Later* (*Cabra marcado para morrer*; Brazil, 1984), which revisits the sites and protagonists of an earlier project on peasant militancy brutally interrupted by the military coup of 1964, is undoubtedly the most influential forerunner here. The much more recent films I compare in what follows are all in their own way indebted to Coutinho's early landmark film and the way it forced out, as a formal indeterminacy between documentary and fiction, the contradictions between history with a capital *H* and the local experiences and personal stories that the former can never fully absorb. Yet instead of reendowing place with mnemonic and affective density, as Coutinho sought to do, these recent films from Argentina and Brazil approach the rural interior as what at first appears to be an exercise in oblivion. By stripping it of previous inscriptions, these films invest landscape with an enigmatic nature, which, however, is often the effect of a staged ingenuity on the part of the cinematic narrator, who misreads or pretends to ignore the previous archival codings of the rural interior. These, nonetheless, are constantly put in evidence, but as elliptic traces, the legibility of which has come under challenge.

On the Road Again: Spatial Performances. To the sound of a harmonica ostinato holding a single high note, before it is joined by the slow improvisations of two heavily distorted guitars playing open chords and chromatic glissandi, a long dolly shot through the windshield of a car slowly advances along a godforsaken country road into a barren landscape of dry brush and anemic trees. A roaring truck, and after a while, another, rush past in the opposite direction. A jump cut follows, then another shot of the same, monotonous savanna, now rushing past the car's side window, with

14 Ivana Bentes, "The *Sertão* and the *Favela* in Contemporary Brazilian Film," in *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. Lúcia Nagib (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 126. On Trapero's film, see Jens Andermann, *New Argentine Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 64–73.

storm clouds gathering over the dark silhouette of a mountain on the horizon, before the screen fades to black. Next, this sequence of long, mobile takes (each in excess of a minute) gives way to a quick succession of photographic slides, first of a desolate roadside shack, chickens suspended mid-motion, the graffiti-covered wall advertising homemade food; then, of the clumsy al fresco paintings decorating the little canteen's interior, one depicting a city scene with a beach, a cathedral, and bus terminal. In the other, a couple embraces in front of a furiously orange palm-tree sunset, captioned with truckers' poetry: "Viajo porque preciso / Volto porque te amo" (I travel because I have to / I return because I love you). An elderly woman, then a teenage girl—perhaps the café's attendants—pose in front of the painted walls in their cheap, everyday clothes while road noise and female voices briefly mix with the guitar chords. The sequence closes with more slides of two men squatting in the shadow next to a bus shelter and looking out onto the empty road, before the film cuts to the title credits painted on a white chalk wall.

Swimming Pool Cylan Acrylic Hinterland (*Sertão de acrílico azul piscina*; Brazil, 2004), Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes's medium-length film essay, stands out among the other entries of the Fundação Itaú's *Brasil 3 × 4* compilation of award-winning medium-length documentaries as the only contribution not so much concerned with a particular social geography as with landscape as a cinematographic artifact.¹⁵ Indeed, the film was shot, as the final credits reveal, across no fewer than six Brazilian states "during the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century." With its nondiegetic sound, almost completely devoid of words (only once, a polyphonic soundscape of pilgrims' voices is laid over the sea of faces staring from the photo wall at local folk saint Padre Cícero's shrine in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará), Ainouz and Gomes's film essay makes the gaze the protagonist of a journey into locales that are always already locations—places of and for cinema—settings laden with visual cliché in which some kind of genre plot appears to be waiting to unfold. The separation of sound from image stylizes and makes generic the latter at the same time that it opens up a critical distance toward it. The duration of the shot, then, forces out not so much the "real" of places but rather their relation to the cinematic archive. That is, it reveals their *virtuality* as settings of films yet to be made but already "recognized" by the frame's composition, as stories to be. The hinterland, the *sertão*, in Ainouz and Gomes, is essentially cinematic space because it is the other or the imaginary of the cinema showroom's urban enclosure: it is already a screen even before the camera takes hold of it.

The four films I compare in the remaining parts of this essay share an ambiguity between the restaging or reenactment of direct, raw experiences of place and their forcing out by the camera, as the photographic indexicality of the image perforates the stagecraft of the editing and mise-en-scène. Two of these, Ainouz and Gomes's *I Travel Because I Have To, I Return Because I Love You* and Donoso's *Opus*, employ the narrative structure of the first-person journey: the former in the idiom of fiction, the latter

15 The other documentaries featured in the collection of films funded through the Itaú Foundation's Rumos Cinema program in its 2004 edition are *Carrapateira Is No Longer Jealous of Apollo 11* (*Carrapateira não tem mais ciúmes da Apolo 11*; Fabiano Maciel), *South Side Girl* (*Garota Zona Sul*; Luca Paiva Mello), *Aristocrata Club* (Jasmin Pinho and Aza Pinho), and *Invisible Daily Pleasures* (*Invisíveis prazeres cotidianos*; Jorane Castro). The selection was released on DVD as *Brasil 3 × 4* (São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2004).

of documentary. The other two—once again, one fiction, one documentary: Lisandro Alonso's *The Dead* and Andrea Tonacci's *The Hills of Disorder*—narrate the itinerary of a "native character" (who is also a "journeyman") from the margins to the center of society and back. In all four films, the narrative template of the travelogue results in an extreme ambiguity between the experience of place offered up by the image's photographic indexicality and the performative space opening up in the interplay of mise-en-scène, acting, shot composition, and editing sequence. Performance, then, must be seen here not so much as the opposite of experience but rather as a forcing out of experiential traces, even though these are left suspended in a state of fundamental uncertainty that complicates the possibility of empathizing with the characters on-screen. As a result, in these films the frame remains in a state of indefinition, or, in Lefebvre's terms, permanently suspended between a narrative and a spectacular viewing—hence, too, the blurring of boundaries between documentary and fiction. This indefinition is in turn brought about by—and reinforces—a crisis of the out of field, that is, of the relations binding the image to its spatiotemporal surroundings and, thus, its social meaning.

Rather than analyze each film in depth, I focus on the way in which landscape (as an uncertain relation between space and place) is solicited through particular kinds of shots, which in turn determine the films' visual grammar. In those films where a journey is being told and performed in the first person, the predominant compositional form is an alternation between tracking or dolly shots of the open road, usually edited in a sequence of a forward-traveling shot through the windshield followed by a lateral pan through the side window and long, immobile takes (sometimes even freeze frames) often, though not necessarily, taking the form of panoramic long shots. Together, these provide a rhythm of motion and stillness that borrows the road movie's narrative template in which the "adventure" is typically curtailed by the effect of an "accident" that brings to a halt the ecstasy of movement and forces our gaze, and the diegetic protagonist, to engage with place in its enigmatic otherness.

In Mariano Donoso's *Opus*, the journey starts with a dolly shot almost identical to the one also opening Ainouz and Gomes's *Viajo porque preciso*: a desert highway at dawn, shot through the windshield, then the side window, of a moving car. But unlike Ainouz and Gomes's film, in which the traveler and intradiegetic bearer of the gaze remains anonymous, here he is identified immediately, appearing at the wheel in the next shot of the sequence. It is none other than Donoso himself, who, right from the beginning, doubles as the main character and protagonist of his own "reflexive documentary," a film that examines the very possibility of "knowing" a place and of transmitting that knowledge as images to an audience. For Bill Nichols, the reflexive documentary represents a mode of exposition, which "emphasizes epistemological doubt" by pointing viewers to the constructed character of the image and stressing the impact of the camera's intervention into the situation it purports to register.¹⁶ Thus, reflexive documentaries draw attention to the conventionality of the genre's rhetoric, denaturalizing its protocols and thus, ultimately, replacing the Griersonian faith in a transparent,

16 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 57, 61.

positive knowledge available to and transmitted by the camera with a more self-critical notion of knowledge as process, as a relation among subjects, filmmakers, and audiences that is unevenly invested with power.

In *Opus*, this negotiated character of meaning is made manifest not just by “the intrusive presence of the filmmaker” and the crew “enacting the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is being performed,” as Stella Bruzzi has characterized the cognate work of Michael Moore and Molly Dineen, but also by the metafictional framing of their performance in a quarrel (during a telephone conversation over a black screen that precedes the road-movie shots opening the filmic sequence proper) between Donoso and his North American uncle and producer “Jerry.”¹⁷ The latter exhorts the reluctant Mariano, in heavily American English, to abandon his previous film project on classical cosmology and engage instead with “real issues, real people”: “You live in Argentina, for God’s sake!” he scolds his nephew. “I wanna see new landscapes of your country, maybe in the West! You were born there, so you know well . . . how is the West? Are there any jungles or pampas?” Mariano reports that there are none, only deserts and mountains. “Good,” concludes Jerry. “I want a child on a long walk to get to a school in the desert. That works, that’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Following this sequence are the tracking shots of the open road described earlier. These, however, are thus already challenged in their truth-value as conventional, generic forms of cinematic rhetoric; the sequences of documentary journeying, instead of bringing us closer to the “truth of place,” can narrate here only the hapless film crew’s increasingly desperate attempts to fulfill its mission—to portray the Argentine crisis through its impact on a rural school (the film was shot in 2002, just after the collapse of Argentina’s national currency). As Jerry suggests in the film’s short prologue, this way of capturing crisis in the havoc it wreaks on the rural poor (a mode of social chronicle applied, for example, in Fernando Solanas’s *Social Genocide [Memoria del saqueo]*; Switzerland, France, and Argentina, 2003) would mobilize the humanitarian conventions of empathy with a suitably inoffensive victim at the same time as taking advantage of the visual pleasure conferred by the landscape sublime. Donoso’s film, however, does not so much confront this caricatured foreign viewer-producer as it critiques the voluntary autoexoticism of certain Argentine documentaries. Eventually, things don’t quite work out as planned, as the crew’s arrival in Donoso’s home province of San Juan coincides with a teachers’ strike in protest against unpaid wages. Unable to shoot any “material” in the deserted country schools, Donoso’s crew turns the rhetoric of the documentary quest on itself, narrating its own quixotic search for schools still not reached by the strike, only for every sequence to end with static, freeze-frame shots of empty, dilapidated classrooms, one with a blackboard still containing a teacher’s last message to her pupils: “3. To study for the practical exam in language: subject and predicate — 4. No class tomorrow.”

In Ainouz and Gomes’s *I Travel Because I Have To*, this narrative critique of the truth of the image is taken yet another step further by introducing a narrative instance entirely absent from the visual plane yet which also subjects the latter completely to its discursive regime. The road movie’s alternating grammar of movement and stasis is

17 Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (London: Routledge, 2006), 186.



Figure 1. The juxtaposition of image and voice in *I Travel Because I Have To, I Return Because I Love You* (*Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo*; Rec Produtores Associados, 2009) cancels out the intricacy of landscape as place, relegating every image to the status of narrative setting even without the principal character ever entering the shot.

attributed here to the voice-over of a geological surveyor who gradually turns out to be also a lovesick urbanite running away from a failed romance and whose voice-over contaminates the image with melodrama (Figure 1). This anonymous voice finds any place (or image of place) already pregnant with stories, or rather, his own story, thus canceling out the local specificity that his own geological measurements purport to register. The character's surveying activities are shot in freeze frames of rock and soil in photographic close-up, including measuring instruments and pencil sketches, and are cross-edited into the sequences of tracking shots of the road that form the bulk of the film. Yet whatever its qualities as geological place, as an image edited into the diegetic sequence, landscape is always already doomed here to succumb to narrative setting. At the same time, the scant resistance *sertão* and *precordillera* oppose, in *I Travel Because I Have To* and *Opus*, to their inscription as generic images into the narrative travelogue, also points to a weakening of the landscape as a form of otherness, an "opening onto the unknown," in Jean-Luc Nancy's formulation.¹⁸ It registers the demise of landscape as a potential catalyst for an ethical and epistemological unsettling that might propel a "change of view" (as in the cinematic ruralisms of the 1960s and 1970s, where coming face-to-face with rural otherness was expected to trigger an emergent revolutionary consciousness).

Yet in both *Opus* and *I Travel Because I Have To*, the narrative instance is actually split in two: on the one hand, there is the intradiegetic narrator-protagonist (as voice-over, in *I Travel*; as self-performance, in *Opus*); on the other hand, there is the director-auteur in charge of the composition and editing of shots. Unlike his internal double, the latter draws on the fundamentally unstable and ambiguous character of cinematic space as setting and as landscape. Whereas the internal narrator is constantly involved in

18 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Uncanny Landscape," in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 59.



Figure 2. A shot from Mariano Donoso's *Opus* (El Pampero Cine and El Zonda Films, 2005), in which the relation between the filmmaker and the landscape at a moment of historical crisis is acknowledged through the image's framing by the ruined site of the provincial government building.

tying the image back to his own story as narrative setting, the director-auteur's compositional work reinstates the balance between a narrative and a spectacular viewing, thus alerting us to the historical intricacy of place even, and especially, when it is but a mere remainder or excess of the image's inexorably generic, conventional nature. Both films, I would argue, are fundamentally about this resistance of landscape even as they register its crisis, about places breaking forth at the same time as their cinematic production is being submitted to a relentless critique.

In *Opus*, an eloquent example of the way the real breaks forth in and through the very image that questions its truth-value appears in a sequence approximately halfway into the film, which reveals the making of the panoramic shot over the city of San Juan that we had seen at the beginning of the film. In fact, it turns out, this establishing shot—voiced over with socioeconomic statistics (a clear reference, in Argentine film history, to the opening sequence of Fernando Birri's foundational documentary *Tóss Me a Dime* [*Tire Dié*, Argentina, 1960])—is actually being filmed from the long-abandoned construction site of the provincial government palace. The image of crisis, then, is not the totalizing, all-encompassing panoramic long shot complete with its voice-of-God commentary—the optic of the state and of classic, Griersonian documentary's panoptic vision of the real—but the ruined viewing platform itself. In the sequence's final image, this building site of an unfinished, future-preterite modernity literally frames the relation between filmmaker and city, with the real being encountered in this both allegorical and tangible embodiment of the fragmented, indeed ruinous cinematic form itself (Figure 2).

With few exceptions, both *Opus* and *I Travel Because I Have To* are composed in an alternation of tracking and quasi-photographic long shots, thus leaving intact the detached point of view implied in the composition of both types of images. Real

engagements with place, consequently, remain rare. Where medium-long shots of a body interacting with its immediate environment appear at all, this body is mostly—in *Opus*—that of Donoso himself, whose encounter with place reveals little about his “reality.” Even the shot sequence of the rural schoolchildren in the film’s final segment (characters who, in a different kind of movie, would have been the object of patient fly-on-the-wall observation) is already marked here as a conventional, staged image by the film’s framing narrative, thus calling into question its “naturalism,” or truth-revealing transparency.

In *I Travel Because I Have To*, the nameless and faceless narrator picks up girls at fueling stations and motels on his nights adrift; the girls are registered in freeze-frame shots. These shots show them as “inhabiting” place only insofar as their sexy poses and heavily made-up, smiling faces insert them not into the *sertão* landscape flashing by in the tracking shots, but into the fantasy world of the sex business that exists on its fringes, at the intersection between rural poverty and national modernity embodied in the highway network. The soundtrack reinforces this contrast between a daytime world of geological surveying, where the narrator’s descriptive language is underscored by diegetic sound, and a nocturnal one of solitary drifting and erotic longing, set to cheesy music on the radio and a voice-over oscillating between a confessional rhetoric and a rambling, dreamy or inebriated stream-of-consciousness. If, in the daytime, “geological” vision of the landscape the camera had been too remote to capture landscape as lived, experiential place, in the nighttime sections it gets too close, so to speak—such as when, in a sequence of a girl performing a striptease in a bleak motel room, the handheld camera indulges in a home-movie porn vision of a reified body and never once allows us a glimpse of the girl’s face (which thus mirrors, in a kind of denied reverse-shot sequence, the physical and facial absence of the narrator himself).

All the same, just as Donoso does in the sequence of the rural school at La Panta, Ainouz and Gomes in these short sequences of (literally) close encounters with real-life characters come up against their film’s own limit—the limit of its visual and narrative composition and the way it casts the landscape as enigmatic, remote, and elusive. Despite their shared acknowledgment of the inexorably framed, generic, and rhetorical nature of documentary access to local “truth,” in fact, neither *Opus* nor *I Travel Because I Have To* ever gives up on place entirely. In both films, the local breaks through the narrative framing as soon as a local character—a face, a voice—appears on-screen. The films’ elaborate, self-referential exercise of epistemological doubt comes up against its own limit at the moment of engaging with an “other” (a limit that is, as we shall see, the very trigger for Alonso’s and Tonacci’s films). In *I Travel Because I Have To*, the two single instances occur toward the end of the film when local people are granted a name and a voice: the first, in a long interview sequence with Paty, a real-life nightclub dancer with whom, in the diegetic fiction, the narrator spends a day and a night in frenzied, cheerful oblivion of his postmarital self-pity. The sequence starts with a shot of Paty and two other girls posing in front of a bright pink, flower-printed mattress outside a shop, followed by an interview in front of a fruit stall (the interviewer’s questions are dubbed by Irandhir Santos, the actor “playing” the narrator on the soundtrack) and, finally, a sequence of long, medium-length shots of her posing in front of market stalls and outside a police station in her hot pants and short

top with passersby looking on in admiration. After a jump cut, the sequence closes with a series of soft-focus panning shots of Paty and another girl at the nightclub, dancing a sensual *forró* to the music of the onstage folklore band, soon to be joined by other couples. Here, a kind of documentary window opens up inside the diegesis, with the narrator for once falling silent and allowing a sense of place to emerge from sheer observation—as if, forced by Paty’s commanding screen presence, the film and its narrator could not but recognize, if only for an instant, an intricacy of lived, everyday experience that is impossible to reduce to a diegetic function.

Something similar happens in a sequence not long afterward when Seu Severino, a shoemaker in his workshop (with whom the narrator claims to have had a long conversation about the construction of the canal), is first seen at work in a medium-long shot of him and his assistant mending and sawing sandals piled up on the floor. Next, Seu Severino falls into an emphatic a cappella rendition of a romantic song about love and abandonment. To use Lefebvre’s terms, these long, medium-length takes of Seu Severino entice our gaze to switch from the narrative to the spectacular mode. Here, however, this opening toward place is immediately rechanneled into the main narrative by the ensuing sequence of grainy, handheld, and out-of-focus roadside tracking shots over which the narrator repeats the verses of Severino’s song about abandonment and love turning into hate, underscored now by the howling and crackling of distorted guitars (the same music already used at the start of *Sertão de acrílico*). In an extraordinary inversion of modern ruralism’s conventions, then, here the voice of rural poetry, in its re-citing by the diegetic narrator that we hear superimposed on landscape tracking shots and nondiegetic sound, conveys a sense not of emplacement but of estrangement from place—even of a potentially terminal kind, as the lateral tracking shots give way to a subjective dolly shot through the windshield during a risky maneuver, trying to overtake a truck on a winding road at night with headlights approaching from the opposite direction to the diegetic sound of horns and engines. The sequence ends with a jump cut to a silent long take of an open field, the extreme overexposure adding to the dreamlike effect (for a moment, we suspect it to be the final image of the narrator’s death, before his voice reemerges, announcing a feeling of regained strength, indeed of survival).

Adrift in the Space of the Other. In the second pair of films I compare—Lisandro Alonso’s *The Dead* and Andrea Tonacci’s *The Hills of Disorder*—the voice and body of an “other” inextricably yet enigmatically linked to place, which had formed the external limit of narrative composition in *Opus* and *I Travel Because I Have To*, are at the formal core of both films. Instead of the split in the narrative instance between the first-person narrator and the author-director, here we find a tension—a dialogue as well as an antagonism—positing the director-narrator against the protagonist. This dialogical structure results in a very different composition of the narrative and of individual shots, a form that Alonso strips to its minimal core and that Tonacci complicates through a complex layering of temporalities and metanarrative framings of the staged, or restaged, performance at its heart. In both films, the otherness of landscape is not so much eliminated as actively teased out by a narrative construction in which a “native character” (the backwoodsman Argentino Vargas, in *The Dead*; the Awá-Guajá

Indian Carapirú, in *Hills of Disorder*) performs a “return journey.” As a result, the character’s own experience and recognition of his environment contrasts with our own foreignness, thus relegating our gaze to a position of exteriority that demands attentive observation.

In *The Dead*, the “enigmatic” character of the hero and of the landscape he inhabits are just as much the effect of the laconic performance and the remoteness of the location as they are the result of shot composition. Alonso’s camera almost always remains at medium distance, prompting us to observe Argentino’s interactions with his immediate surroundings, yet never venturing either close enough to reveal his emotional responses (as in the close-up or affect-image) or far enough to inscribe his actions within a wider social or natural totality. The otherness of place and protagonist is, then, also the effect of a visual rhetoric that binds them to each other, forcing us to infer the “truth” of one from the relation with the other, yet never revealing themselves outside of this relation (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Argentino Vargas in Lisandro Alonso’s *The Dead* (4L, Fortuna Films, and Slot Machine, 2004). The subtropical rainforest reveals itself as a “place” here only through the actions the protagonist performs in and with his environment, just as it is this very interaction that provides us with the only cues about this taciturn, enigmatic character.

Effectively, then, even though the image in Alonso’s film almost always remains within the formal parameters of a cinema of action (with the protagonist occupying the center of the frame), it is at the same time rooted in a constant suspension of narrative. In *The Dead*, for instance, the explosion of violence suggested by the meandering opening shot over bloodied bodies in the forest (which may or may not be a dream or flashback to a crime committed by Argentino) never materializes; nor does, indeed, any revelation or confession on behalf of the character relating this opening sequence to the diegesis proper. But narrative is also suspended by a kind of image that constantly forces the narrative gaze to revert to the spectacular, observant viewing that is attributed by Lefebvre to the landscape shot, but solicited here by way of a constantly stalled or suspended narrative progress. The image, in other words, or rather our own viewing relation with it, is forever suspended, left hanging, between the narrative and the spectacular.

In *Hills of Disorder*, we find a similar construction of the central character Carapirú’s restaged flight—some twenty years before the film was made—from his native tribe when it was attacked and massacred by invading *fazendeiros* (cattle ranchers). Carapirú roamed the *sertões* of the Brazilian north for several years before being taken in by some villagers in Bahia, more than a thousand kilometers away, and eventually reunited through FUNAI (National Indian Foundation), the indigenous affairs agency, with the survivors of his clan and family. Tonacci frames Carapirú’s journey through different types of commentary, including interview sequences and documentary footage of the

present life of other participants in the restaged central adventure (shot in black-and-white, whereas interviews and footage referring to the present are in color). There are also “dream sequences,” loosely attributed to Carapirú himself, as well as archive footage from Brazilian television and cinema from the time of Carapirú’s original journey, which also illustrates the wider process of the country’s continuous encirclement of its aboriginal cultures and their dwelling places. But complicating the distinction between frame and story proper, Tonacci constantly blurs the boundaries between them—first and foremost, between the restaged past and the documentary present, but also between sequences attributed to Carapirú’s own reminiscing and those representing the discourse of an omniscient, third-person narrator. Indeed, the testimonial truth of Carapirú’s presence, which underwrites Tonacci’s narrative, is complicated by the hero’s inability to communicate beyond a few monosyllables, which also casts doubt on the nature of his participation in the film. As Ivone Margulies writes, “If testimony is based on the transmission of a person’s past experience—what happens once the film’s central character’s consciousness is inaccessible, when Carapirú’s memory and sense of self remain, throughout the film, opaque? What then is the function of the re-enacted presence, if he cannot speak, or be understood?”¹⁹

Whereas in Alonso the opaque, intractable nature of the protagonist and his environment emerge as the effect of an intensity (of actoral performance and cinematic observation), here, instead, it comes about in a Brechtian self-critique of the truth-value of the several layers of image and narrative. These frame one another in a game of mirrors, while at the center the elusive, illegible body of Carapirú denies us any access to the real experience the multiple framings keep pointing to. At the same time, just as in *The Dead*, the enigmatic nature of the protagonist in *Hills of Disorder* redirects our gaze to the environment in search of cues. Indeed, the truth of the performance is underwritten mainly by the identity of locations “then and now” (emphasized through the crosscutting of black-and-white and color sequences). Likewise, in *The Dead*, even though no reference is made to a reenacted “real story,” the reality of the location and the naturalism of Argentino’s performance warrant each other to the point of collapsing experience and performance into one. Yet the opposite is also true in both films, as actor performance infuses the landscape with a dimension of theatricality that challenges its self-evident presence. When asked about the nature of Carapirú’s collaboration in *Hills of Disorder*, Tonacci insisted that, while always responsive to his (or his interpreters’) instructions during the shooting, Carapirú saw little sense in replaying a story that concerned him alone, and he performed his part in the film “only as presence.”²⁰ Indeed, Alonso has also referred to his actors’ performances in very similar terms, their inscrutability on-screen replicating the stoicism and matter-of-factness

19 Ivone Margulies, “El actor (de lo) real: Re-escenificación y transmisión en *S21* y *Serras da desordem*,” in *La escena y la pantalla: Cine contemporáneo y el retorno de lo real*, ed. Jens Andermann and Álvaro Fernández Bravo (Buenos Aires: Colihue, forthcoming).

20 Stephanie Dennison and Mauricio Lissovsky, “Screen Talk with Andrea Tonacci,” *Reality Effects: Poetics of Locality, Memory and the Body in Contemporary Argentine and Brazilian Cinema* (symposium lecture, Birkbeck College, London, November 28, 2009). See also “Entrevista con Andrea Tonacci,” in *Serras da desordem*, ed. Daniel Caetano (Rio de Janeiro: Açougue, 2008), 97–137, 120.

of their participation in the shooting.²¹ In fact, it is in this enigmatic silence of a suspended testimony, I would argue, that place becomes in Alonso's and Tonacci's films something like the absent voice: not in the sense that it dissolves or "explains" this silence by contextualizing it, but rather by directing our gaze toward the material world of the characters' spatial surroundings and toward their bodily interactions with those surroundings as saturated with meaning. In locating the silent, impermeable body, place also takes on a share of the latter's opacity.



Figure 4. A shot from the final sequence of Andrea Tonacci's *Hills of Disorder* (Extremart, 2006), in which a bottom-up panning shot over the Awá-Guajá reservation reveals the way in which "civilization" (in the form of deforestation and helicopters patrolling the sky) encroaches on the space of "nature," endowing it with a theatrical, or showcase-like, dimension.

As Edgardo Dieleke has noted, this theatricalization of a nature-turned-stagelike is the effect both of the *mise-en-scène* and of the real encroachment of "progress and civilization" on a "restricted, literally fenced-off" nature.²² In the final sequence of *Serras*, following the reencounter with his tribe, Carapirú strips and wanders off into the virgin forest, in "biographical" black-and-white, only for him and the camera to stumble upon Tonacci and his crew, who are waiting to start shooting the film's opening sequence in which Carapirú revives the tribal firebrand (and thus, literally, restores the continuity of historical time interrupted by the assault on the village).²³ Just prior to their encounter, which closes the narrative circle at the same time that it breaks open the internal fiction of "bio-graphy," a long, panoramic color shot of the tribal community house in a forest clearing is inserted, with the camera panning slowly upward until it reveals the extremely reduced area of the Awá-Guajá reservation, surrounded by farmland and crossed, in that very moment, by a triad of helicopters surveying the sky

21 See, for instance, Quintín, "El misterio del leñador solitario," *El amante de cine* 111 (June 2001): 2–5.

22 Edgardo Dieleke, "The Return of the Natural: Landscape, Nature and the Place of Fiction," in *New Argentine and Brazilian Cinema: Reality Effects*, ed. Jens Andermann and Alvaro Fernández Bravo (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 64.

23 On the compositional importance of fire in *Serras da desordem*, see Ismail Xavier, "As artimanhas do fogo, para além do encanto e do mistério," in *Serras da desordem*, ed. Daniel Caetano (Rio de Janeiro: Açougue, 2008), 7–18.

and a goods train moving in the distance (Figure 4). Similarly, at the end of *The Dead*, when Argentino has encountered his grandson in the depths of the rainforest, Alonso's camera abandons them as they enter the family hut, panning slowly downward until it encounters, in the dust by the entrance, the little plastic figure of a toy footballer in national gear, a "commodity fetish," the presence of which unmakes the sensation of pristine, uncontaminated nature in a state of pure exteriority.

Unlike the archival images from *Globo Repórter* in *Hills of Disorder*, which had registered Carapirú's first return to his native village in a clear-cut opposition between the indigenous culture available to the camera as an exotic object of curiosity and the microphone-clasping anchorwoman representing the superior technology of television and its capacity to "know" otherness, the relation between "civilization" and "nature" in Tonacci's and Alonso's films is a more complex, two-sided affair. Here, the restaged action, in its ambiguous oscillation between experience and performance, undoes the illusion of transparent access to the naked visibility of the primitive. At the same time, as the sequence confronting Carapirú and Tonacci at the end of *Hills of Disorder* makes explicit, the relation between the characters' circular itinerary from the outer margins of the rural world into the institutions of the state and back to "nature," on the one hand, and the filmmakers' journey, on the other hand, traveling in the opposite direction, also transforms the restaged performance into a site of encounter and exchange. The radically intersubjective character of Tonacci's and Alonso's films becomes manifest not just on the level of actor performance—as an enigmatic "presence"—but on that of cinematic composition as well, where it induces subtle shifts in the narrative point of view.

Although overall the cinematic narrator maintains the observant distance expressed in the medium-long shot, on the level of the editing sequence there is also an approximation between narrative perspective and the characters' own experience of place in the diegesis. In both films, the editing rhythm changes as we move from one theater of action to another. There are three of these: the forest, the village or small town, and the space of the state—the latter represented in *Hills of Disorder* by the city of Brasília and the family home of the *sertanista* (ethnologist) Sydney Possuelo and in *The Dead* by the interior of the prison. In both films, the forest sequences are dominated by long takes, often without moving the action forward. The prison and city sequences nevertheless display considerably more alternation between shots, including in both films the presence of intradiegetic television and radio sets, which add to a considerably higher-pitched tempo of images and sounds.

The small town or village represents a transitional space between these two areas of experience and narrative form, and these transitions are marked in both films by two kinds of shots. On the one hand, there is the already-familiar dolly shot from a moving car, leading from the town or village space to the city or prison and back. In *The Dead*, Argentino is given a lift into town on the back of a police van, narrated in a forward track followed by a lateral tracking shot taken from the rear end of the truck that keeps Argentino and the cabin in the center of the frame as the landscape rushes past. As Argentino gets off by a bus stop, the camera stays put, performing a 180-degree pan before the van drives off, slowly losing him in the distance—a splendid, concise way of conveying Argentino's abandonment by the state once his prison term has expired. In

The Hills of Disorder, Carapirú's departure from the village with the two FUNAI officers is likewise told in a series of tracking shots through the front, side, and back windows of the moving car, including the heads and upper body of Carapirú and the *sertanistas* inside the vehicle. Next, Tonacci cuts to lateral pans of the car's shadow as it races over the barren, sunbaked ditches on the side of the road, underscored with a monotonous synthesizer melody, which is associated in *Hills of Disorder's* audiovisual grammar with engines, helicopters, and highways encroaching on "nature." The sequence closes with a long, panoramic take of the nightly lights of Brasília in the distance, edited to a newsreader's voice on the sound track reporting Carapirú's first encounter with FUNAI some twenty years earlier.

In contrast, the junction between forest and village space is rendered in both films by panning shots signaling a much smoother transition, which takes place within the same take. In *The Hills of Disorder*, Carapirú's arrival at the village is told first in a black-and-white sequence of the villagers chasing him through the wood after he has tried to kill and steal a piglet. Edited in a dramatic parallel montage of the escaping Carapirú and the villagers roaming through the wood, which makes us expect a violent climax, the encounter finally occurs at the center of a medium wide-angle shot that spoils any elements of surprise, with the camera panning after the group as they all walk off amiably toward the village. Next, we see Carapirú's return to the village in color, greeting and embracing old acquaintances; the handheld, panning camera is now much closer to the action than in the first, more carefully staged "narrative" sequence. In *The Dead*, there is likewise a series of long pans following Argentino as he crosses the village before he arrives at the riverbank. Here, we first see a boatman cleaning some fish by the shore before Argentino walks into the frame; they start conversing while the camera slowly pans around them and toward the river, where Argentino will eventually disappear in the distance in one of the boats moored at the landing. In the course of this long farewell from the town and from society, prior to his reimmersion into the aquatic world of islands and streams, Argentino is twice asked to confess his crime. "So you've been in prison?" inquires the boatman (in Spanish). "They say you killed your brothers?" But both times Argentino refuses to answer. The transition, then, on the level both of shot composition and of narrative content, fails to deliver any transformative, revelatory element—the threshold is crossed without any contest or initiation rite. "Eso ya me pasó" (that's already behind me) is all Argentino will say before switching to Guaraní, leaving behind the language of the law and the state even before he boards the canoe and paddles away.

The use of pans and tracking shots functions here as a kind of visual echo of the characters' experience of space and place, yet without ever giving up the medium distance of observation in favor of subjective point-of-view shots. Against the near absence of speech in both *The Hills of Disorder* and *The Dead*, the relation between characters' bodily performance and the shot composition in their mutual engagement with the natural surroundings becomes a form of communication. A magnificent example of this rhythmic, even choreographic, interplay between camera and actor is the long tracking shot in *The Dead* of Argentino adrift in his canoe, the camera floating with the stream beside him, until both finally part ways, and the camera drifts off into a separate current, continuing to deliver an autonomous image of river and forest long after

Argentino has disappeared from the frame. Here, then, a fourth type of shot insinuates itself, in which the engagement between camera and place differs fundamentally both from the rhythm of tracking and photographic long shots that dominate in *Opus* and in *I Travel Because I Have To*, and from the medium-length shot predominating in *Hills of Disorder* and *The Dead*, which observes the restaged performance in the theater of experience.

This shot, drifting away from and once losing sight of the protagonist, has in *The Dead* not so much the function of delivering a superior, totalizing perspective (as in Tonacci's final panoramic shot, where the camera is literally above the point-of-view of the reservation's inhabitants), but rather of forcing out a different level of engagement with "space freed from eventhood," to return to Lefebvre's definition of cinematic landscape.²⁴ Without the presence of the protagonist, the landscape surges on-screen and lacks any cues as to how we should approach it in its enigmatic otherness. In an even more radical fashion, this adriftness of the camera's gaze is deployed in the dreamlike sequence at the beginning of *The Dead* as a form of immersion in nature. This both utopian and terrifying prospect of amalgamation between the cinematic apparatus and nature is almost immediately withdrawn again, for the film to relapse into its more classical, medium-distance framing of diegetic action. In the opening shots, the swirling, meandering pans of the camera seem to mimic the very rhythms and movements of the forest, like an insect's or a reptile's gaze, before stumbling upon the bloodied corpses of children in the undergrowth (to which this strangely inhuman gaze pays no more attention than to the accidents of soil and vegetation). This sequence, cut against a medium-length take of the sleeping Argentino on his last day in prison from which it is separated by a fade into green, has perhaps too readily been taken by the film's critics as a "nightmare sequence" haunting the ex-killer. Similarly, the dreamlike first sequence of Awá clan life before the massacre in *The Hills of Disorder*, following images of the sleeping Carapirú and superimposed onto shots of flames and archive images of Indians and *garimpeiros* (rubber collectors), has been read as a flashback, a space of subjective memory to which the rest of the film resolutely denies us access. Instead, I would suggest that these sequences seek out a vision of and in nature beyond its association with the protagonist (and thus also beyond the borderlands of society, where the hero still dwells and that are marked out as borders precisely through these minimal incursions into a "nature beyond"). But this dimension of depth, which invites the gaze to immerse itself in space, is available only in brief moments of a doubly suspended action. It is a depth no longer available to a "fenced-off nature," where only patches of wilderness interrupt the monotony of dilapidated, deforested, and periurbanized lands, much as these "drifting shots" of landscape interrupt diegetic continuity.

Conclusion. In an intriguing article that contrasts the feminized rural interior of Andrucha Waddington's *Me Você Them* (*Eu tu eles*; Brazil, 2000) and of Ainouz's *Love for Sale* (*O céu de Suely*; Brazil, Germany, and Portugal, 2007) with *Cinema Novo*'s epic *sertão* of revolutionary incipience, Isis Sadek argues that in these films the infusion of

24 Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape," 22.

rural landscape with gendered affect subverts and redirects the spatial discourses of Brazilian cinematic modernity. For Sadek, these feminized “return[s] to the *sertão* seem to open pathways for an auteurial cinematic return to the *sertão* . . . that elude[s] the national allegorical framework[.] . . . tracing new paths for cinema.”²⁵ By contrast, the films analyzed here stop short of any affective reinvestment in their registration of the decline of landscape as a space of otherness and resistance to the existent social order where, in the politicized ruralism of the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionary potentiality could still be projected. Sadek’s reading also alerts us to the profoundly gendered dimension of this demise of a “primitive” world at the margins, which, as Gabriela Nouzeilles argues, once offered itself as a stage for “the return to a more primitive and thus more ‘natural’ masculinity.”²⁶ But even as they eschew the epic associations of the landscape form—either through ironic disavowal, as in *Opus* and *I Travel Because I Have To*, or through the central characters’ opacity, as in *The Dead* and *The Hills of Disorder*, which forecloses any heroic investment—all four films nevertheless reinscribe in rural space the negativity that is proper to the landscape form as opposed to “nature.” Landscape, to quote Nancy, is the space of crisis relegated to the margins of the social, the border space where the social bond ends or where its limitations come to the fore: “[T]here is no more community, no more civic life, but it is not simply ‘nature.’ It is the land of those who have no land, who are uncanny and estranged [*le pays des dépayés*], who are not a people, who are at once those who have lost their way and those who contemplate the infinite—perhaps their infinite estrangement.”²⁷

Remarkably, this logic of self-exhaustion, which Nancy finds to be inherent in the landscape form as an expression of the way in which modernity negotiates its relation with its own outside, also echoes Deleuze’s idea of cinematic naturalism. Naturalism, for Deleuze, refers to the way in which cinema—the example here is Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante*—conveys an “originary world” that is “both radical beginning and absolute end. . . . It is thus a world of a very special kind of violence (in certain respects, it is the radical evil); but it has the merit of causing an originary image of time to rise, with the beginning, the end, and the slope, all the cruelty of Chronos.”²⁸ The landscape of naturalism is therefore not simply a “beyond” of history—the immersion into nature suggested by Alonso’s and Tonacci’s drifting shots as a line of flight—but rather the denial or “suspension of a passage, and this passage occurs as a separation, an emptying-out of the scene or of being: not even a passage from one point to another or from one moment to another, but the step of the opening itself.”²⁹ This “emptying-out of being” of the scene, I suggest, is the way in which, in the four films analyzed

25 Location-scouting footage from this earlier film provided much of the material subsequently edited into *I Travel Because I Have To*. Isis Sadek, “A Sertão of Migrants, Flight and Affect: Genealogies of Place and Image in Cinema Novo and Contemporary Brazilian Cinema,” *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 7, no. 1 (2010): 71.

26 Gabriela Nouzeilles, “Desert Dreams: Nomadic Tourists and Cultural Discontent,” in *Images of Power: Iconography, Culture and the State in Latin America*, ed. Jens Andermann and William Rowe (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2006), 258.

27 Nancy, “Uncanny Landscape,” 61.

28 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986), 124.

29 Nancy, “Uncanny Landscape,” 61.

here, landscape becomes a mode of cognitive mapping—of charting the outlines of the crisis of place (historical practice) and space (representation) that is the common denominator of both the cinematic form and the rural environments it encounters and engages. As a figure of the threshold, of crisis and of critical opening (on previous forms of politicized ruralism and on the historical crisis of ecocide, dictatorial repression, and neoliberal dilapidation that led to its demise), landscape is here the very denial of place, the “incessant estrangement and unsettlement” mentioned by Nancy, which results from these political and socioeconomic realities. But it is also, crucially, a way of seeing, the errant or itinerant gaze solicited by this place in crisis, and thus a form of historical experience that cinema has access to on the very level of its own formal and narrative protocols. *